

NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

Executive Registry

81-1311

Director

27 MAY 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT : Public Release of NFAC Unclassified Reports

The attached staff study was prepared in response to your request that we review the policy of distributing NFAC unclassified reports to the general public. I think it usefully describes present policy and its implications for NFAC and the public. Because of the Agency-wide implications, I agree with the recommendation of the study that the policy on release should be addressed by the ExComm.

Background

Public release of unclassified CIA publications goes back more than 20 years. Nearly all such publications are produced in the first instance for consumers in the Executive Branch and elsewhere in government; their release to the public is a byproduct made possible because the cost is low. But the tendency over the years has been to release more and more publications to an ever-expanding readership. In 1972, 27 individual NFAC publications were released; in 1978, the number approached 150. The number of copies printed varies with the subject of the report and the anticipated interest. The more narrowly focused reports have a press run of between 1,700 and 2,000 copies; those of more general interest are printed in as many as 6,000 copies.

NFAC distributes its unclassifieds through government outlets which sell subscriptions and single publications to the public. Some direct distribution is done by the producing offices, the Office of Public Affairs, the NFAC Coordinator for Academic Relations, and DDO's [redacted]

Arguments For and Against

Proponents of public release say that it enhances the Agency's image, contributes to public understanding of the role of intelligence, and provides a return to the taxpayer in the form of increased information on issues of national concern. They also say it increases the feedback from the business and academic communities and helps Agency recruitment.

Opponents stress the potential risks to CIA sources and methods and to US foreign policy when NFAC publications—particularly those that are analytic or judgmental—are released. They cite loss of some Soviet open-source information and claim that public release provides grist for our media critics. They also argue that objectivity is difficult to maintain when the Agency takes a position publicly and that the Agency risks becoming embroiled in policy debate. In addition, they believe that the public release effort is an inappropriate allocation of resources.

Conclusions

While there are good arguments on both sides of this issue, expansion of the program certainly is not warranted. If we discontinue it, there may be a significant increase in FOIA requests as an effort by outsiders to acquire the information now handled by DOCEX, NTIS, etc. Discontinuing the program would also, I believe, cause some reaction, though minor, in the business and academic communities that now have become accustomed to this service.

Recommendations

I recommend that we discontinue release of any publication of an analytic/judgmental nature.

APPROVED/DISAPPROVED:

Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

Date

I recommend that we discontinue the distribution of any unclassified NFAC publications except to our normal customer list, i.e., official organs of the United States Government.

APPROVED/DISAPPROVED:

Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

Date


John N. McMahon

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